The Party

Chapter One: Notions of an Assemblage

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Wilson Cokeley thought himself a fantastic party-thrower. Born thirty years prior to these events into a cradle lined with ostrich feathers, he also thought himself a pinnacle in New York's upper-class scene. Mister Cokeley had a number of equally (never moreso) wealthy friends, whom he often took great pleasure in rounding up all in one room, despite their tendency to disagree over most anything. These friends were: Misses Shiloh St. Beaux, whose hair was molded to her head in intricate loops, and whose ego was almost as big and fancy as her name; Mister Christopher St. Beaux, husband of Misses St. Beaux, who would really rather have settled down in the countryside; Mister Leonard Ethem, a journalist who took great pride in eliciting confusion from his company through big, juicy, pretentious words; Misses Dahlia Larouche, who was regretfully married to Mister Ethem; and Zoette, Mister Cokeley's personal assistant.

One night, as Mister Cokeley laid in bed, fretting over something only wealthy people fret over, he shouted out:

"Zoette! Zoette, come."

Zoette popped her head into the room. It should be noted that Zoette was of a noticeable beauty-of course, this was no use to Mister Cokeley,

whose eyes had never quite drifted towards the feminine.
“Yes, sir?”
“Ah, for the last *time*, Zoette! *Mister. Cokeley!* Unless you’d like me to embroider it on your handkerchief, for Christ’s sake!”
“I apologize.”
“Hush!”
Mister Cokeley rubbed his face dramatically, as if troubled by some great injustice.
“Was there so- “
“Hush, woman! Can’t I have a moment to *think*?”
And so, he thought. Zoette stood by, looking upon her employer with a carefully hidden judgement. Mister Cokeley took in a great breath of air, and sat himself upright in bed.
“Zoette, take a letter. Or, no, two. No, three. Tell me, Zoette, would it rub you the wrong way if you received a letter addressed to your husband, but additionally pertaining to you?”
Zoette fumbled over a few sheets of paper, setting herself down at Mister Cokeley’s desk so to have appropriate access to the inkwell.
“No, I’d think not.”
“Hush! Pay attention, now- Dear Mister, and Misses, St. Beaux. I hope this letter finds you in pleasant condition. As of late, notions of a party have rattled about in my head, and I must say, the bottle of red wine from last year’s mixer only gets more tempting with time. Are you getting

this, Zoette?”
“Yes.”
“Yes, *sir*.”
“Yes sir.”
“For the last time, Zoette, *Mister Cokeley*.”
“Yes, Mister Cokeley.”
“Don’t distract me, Zoette. Anyway- this said, Zoette and I would adore your attendance to our little, what do you call it?”
“Party?”
“Oh, don’t be so *boring*, Zoette! Life is short!”
Zoette dipped her pen into the pot of ink.
“To our- oh… *assemblage*! Yes, assemblage, on, what day is it now, Zoette?”
“The fourteenth, Mister Cokeley.”
“And two weeks’ time?”
“The first.”
“Right. Our little, ah, *assemblage,* on the first. Now read that back to me, Zoette.”
Zoette read it back to him, wiping a drip of ink onto her skirt hem.
“How shall I end it?”
“It should be formal, with a hint of affection. *But not too much*! We can’t have them think we’re clawing at their door. Let’s see- sincere.”
“Sincerely?”
“*Yes*! Sincerely.”
He enunciated the word carefully a few times, before his mind did away with it.
“Read it again. Slower this time, if you would.”

Zoette read the letter again as Mister Cokeley listened intently, clearly marveled by the noise of his own thoughts.
“Perfect. Yes, that’s the one.”
Mister Cokeley rose out of bed with a start, throwing the sheets from himself and planting his ghostly white feet, which had very obviously never gone bare or seen a hard day’s work, on the floor.
“Copy those and mail them out, Zoette. We mustn’t waste time. And, when you get the chance, fix me a scotch.”
“On the rocks?”
“Oh, and I thought you knew me, Zoette.”
“Who shall I put on the guest list?”
“Oh, all of the cul-de-sac! This’ll be fun.”
Zoette nodded quickly, gathering the papers.

Chapter Two: Summoning the Cul-De-Sac

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“Leonard! You’ve been out there on that damn typewriter all night! Come to bed!”
Leonard sighed, looking upon the thin two paragraphs he’d managed to squeeze past, despite his exhaustion.
“Soon, Dahlia!” He replied, hunching back over his typewriter.
Dahlia climbed out of bed, adjusting her pin curls and sliding her slippers onto her pedicured feet. She shuffled into the living room, her nightgown swishing about her shins.
“Leonard, I’ll take a bat to that thing if you don’t come to bed *right now*.”
Leonard massaged his temples, turning around in his chair to face his wife.

“Dahlia, this deadline will simply be the death of me.”
Dahlia looked away from him, crossing her arms.
“Well, it doesn’t take a genius to figure what you must think of me, then.”
Leonard sighed, standing from his chair and planting a kiss onto his wife’s cheek.
“Go back to bed, Dahlia.”
“Oh, sure. ‘*Go back to bed, Dahlia*’, I’ll keep you up all night long with my clickity-clacking, just make sure you’re up bright and early to put my bacon on!”
Leonard huffed, plopping himself back into his chair and carefully aligning his typewriter to the page.
“See! You don’t really love me.”
Leonard, too tired to respond, tapped away at the keys.
“Sure! I’ll just drop dead! Forget all those times I tended to you when you were sick, bought you paper for that *damn* typewriter, slaved in the kitchen!”
Leonard’s shoulders heaved as he snapped the paper back into place.
“This damn thing,” he swore under his breath.
“Serves you right!”
Leonard said nothing. Dahlia stared at him dourly.
“You know? *Fine*. I’ll go back to bed, and have the best sleep of my life! I hope you don’t get a *wink*! Stay out here all night- see if I care!”

Dahlia turned, shuffling back towards the bedroom. She paused for a moment, shifting to face her husband.
“Oh, and, a letter came for you. Something about a party- though, I’m sure you’ll be too busy.”
Leonard nodded, his typewriter snapping away.

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Christopher St. Beaux and his wife, Shiloh St. Beaux, sat at the dinner table. Chistopher ate hungrily, whilst Shiloh picked at the bone of her steak sullenly.
“What’s the matter?”
“You know, we really eat too much meat. Barbaric.”
“*Too much*? How can you have too much of something so wonderful? I’d say we don’t have enough!”
Shiloh nodded, spearing a green bean with her fork.
“I’d prefer something more… *leafy*. I’ve heard iceberg lettuce does wonders for the figure.”
“You know,” Christopher said through a mouthful of food,
“If you’re so worried about your figure, I’d happily eat your steak.”
Shiloh placed the green bean into her mouth, chewing idly. Suddenly, her face lit up.

“Oh! Winston invited us to a party- sometime next week, I believe.”
“Who?”
“Mister Cokeley.”
“Oh, *him*? That quack?”
“He isn’t a *quack*. He’s eccentric.”
“Yeah, well, he can ‘eccentric’ himself all he wants, long as I don’t have to hear about it.”
“We’re *going* to this party. Let’s face it, Christopher, we aren’t exactly, let’s call it, *prospering*, socially. We need to meet more people.”
Christopher sighed and wiped his mouth with his napkin.
“This *never* would have been a problem back in Virginia.”
Shiloh slammed her fork down on the table and glared at Christopher.
“I’ve heard *enough* about Virginia. Country this, country that- this is the *city*, and we are going to *fit in*,” she said, standing up from her seat and storming out of the dining room.

Chapter Three: The Guests Arrive

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At a quarter past eight, the doorbell rang. Mister Cokeley bustled down the stairs, adjusting the fit of his suit jacket.
“Zoette, answer that!”
Zoette opened the door, met with the well-dressed St. Beaux couple.
“Hello, welcome in. Not one to be fashionably late, I take it?”
“Yes, Zoe, was it? No, no. We wanted to make a good impression,” said Misses St. Beaux as she draped her coat over Zoette’s arm and entered the house, her less-than-thrilled husband following just behind.
“Ah! The St. Beaux- it’s certainly been a moment since we last spoke,” said Mister Cokeley.
“Thank you for responding to our invitation so promptly! I feel this should be a wonderful evening.”
Misses St. Beaux placed a kiss lightly on each side of Mister Cokeley’s face, causing her husband’s irritated red complexion to purple slightly.
“Mister St. Beaux! I don’t believe we had the chance to speak at the mixer.”
“No, I don’t think we did.”
“Remind me, what’s your line of work?”
“Craftsmanship.”

“Ah! The woodworking enterprise.”
“Yes, Christopher mostly carves newel posts and interior balustrades,” added Misses St. Beaux.
“Well, I imagine that must take skill, Mister St. Beaux! You *must* show me some of your work sometime.”
Just then, a knock at the door. Zoette opened the door, offering her forearm for the lady and gentleman to place their coats. Misses Larouche gleefully trotted into the foyer, embracing a slightly startled Mister Cokeley.
“Winston! It’s been far too long!”
“Dahlia! I hadn’t expected you to arrive so soon,” said Mister Cokeley as he awkwardly patted her back.
“And Leonard! How are things?”
“Oh, copacetic, as usual.”
Mister Cokeley looked to Zoette over Misses Larouche’s shoulder. ‘*Meaning, ‘well’*”, she mouthed. Mister Cokeley nodded.
“Is that everyone, Zoette?” Mister Cokeley asked as he released Misses Larouche.
“Yes, I think so.”
“Excellent- shall we sit down?”

Chapter Four: The First Course

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At nine, Mister Cokeley and associates were sat at the table, making light conversation over the previously mentioned red wine, courtesy of the St. Beaux.

“So, Leonard. I hear the presses are hot lately?” remarked Misses St. Beaux.

“Oh, *exceedingly* so- in fact…” Mister Ethem paused to sip his wine, swirling the glass with a flick of his wrist. His wife, at this point rather conditioned to her husband’s orations, relaxed in her chair. Leonard leaned in, dropping his voice as if telling them some great secret:

“Now, you didn’t hear this from me, but I hear that one of my associates is working on a piece regarding a- ah, *cadaver*.”

“*Really*?” gasped Misses Larouche. Mister St. Beaux rolled his eyes and tapped back another taste of wine.

“Oh, yes. The buzz says that it was found behind the abandoned storehouse down on… what is it?”

“Sorber?”
“Yes, that’s it.”
“Dreadful,” said Misses St-